

Mona Ground Iguana *Cyclura cornuta stejnegeri*



Family: Iguanidae
Order: Squamata

Description

The Mona ground iguana is the largest of Puerto Rico's lizards. This prehistoric-looking terrestrial reptile can measure up to 3 to 4 feet (0.9 to 1.2 meter) long. Its body is heavy. Its head is big, and its tail is strong. It has a spiny dorsal crest that goes from its head, down to its tail, promontories along its head, and a small, horn-shaped protuberance on the tip of its snout. Their color ranges from olive green to grayish green, and juveniles have brown or blue transversal (width-wise) bands. Often, males are distinguished by their large size, and for having a series of particularly large ridges on their faces.

Biological Information

Reproduction

The reproductive cycle for this species begins in June and ends by November. Females can mate with more than one male. A month after mating, the female



Distribution

digs a burrow underground with its claws and head. The nest is defended for three to four days, to keep other females from using the nest or to keep predators from eating the eggs. The eggshells are soft, and the eggs take three months to hatch. Young iguanas measure between 10 – 12 inches (25 – 30 centimeters) and weigh around 2.5 ounces (approx. 71 grams).

Habitat

This species' habitat is rocky and dry, where the predominant flora is subtropical. The iguana seeks shelter in caves and rocky crevices during the nighttime and the cooler hours of the day.

Diet

The Mona ground iguana is primarily herbivorous, although it can consume animal matter. Its preferred diet consists of fruits, flowers and leaves.

Distribution

The Mona ground iguana is an endemic species of the Mona Island Nature Reserve of Puerto Rico. It inhabits throughout the entire island, from the subtropical dry forest in the plateau, to the coastal plains and scrubland in the island.

Threats

The principal cause for the reduction in the iguana population is the introduction of non-endemic species, such as goats, pigs and cats, to Mona Island. Pigs can root out the iguana eggs out of the burrows and eat them. Cats can easily kill juvenile iguanas. The goats tread on the burrows, collapsing them and crushing the eggs.

THREATENED

Conservation Measures

The Mona ground iguana was included in the federal endangered species list in 1978, and Mona Island was designated a critical habitat for the species. Known burrowing sites are fenced off, to minimize predator impact over them. These metal fences have cutouts that are large enough to allow iguanas to move from the burrowing sites to the outside, but small enough to keep goats and pigs out. Visitors to Mona Island should keep to the paths and walkways. This helps ensure that they will not accidentally destroy iguana burrows, given that they can be hard to notice.

The Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended, prohibits the killing, harassing, trapping, purchasing or selling any species, as well as parts and products derived from the species.

References

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Additional Information

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